

ALCOHOL IN WINES

Their methods to reduce it

In France, low-alcohol wines with degrees below 11% are occasionally launched on the market. To reduce the alcohol content of these wines, the techniques used by operators are varied; partial dealcoholization for some, early harvest for others. The two strategies can, incidentally, be combined.

Although there is no official definition of the low-alcohol wine sector, the tacit consensus is on wines with an alcohol content lower than 11%. Some French operators are investing in this niche market, for which demand is still to be built.

The latest is Domaine Tariquet. *"For over ten years, we had in mind to produce a dry white wine with an alcohol content of less than 10%, obtained naturally, without dealcoholization",* says Armin Grassa, representing the fifth generation of the family at the head of Domaine Tariquet. It is now done, with the launch this year of *Imprévu*, whose final alcohol content is only 9.5%. *"Technically, getting such a degree is pretty easy for us. The oceanic climate that we know on the estate, straddling the Gers and the Landes departments, associated with terroirs of light soils, means that our vines are rarely subject to hydric stress,"* explains Armin Grassa. *"All the white wines of the estate benefit from this situation. Classic, one of our flagship cuvées – with a blend Ugni blanc, Colombard, Sauvignon and Gros Manseng – measures naturally between 10.5 and 11%. With a selection of suitable grape varieties, we can make white wines that are even lower in alcohol. Imprévu is the conformation."*

Last April, Domaine Tariquet (Gers), renowned for its dry and aromatic white wines, launched *Imprévu*, a white wine with a degree of less than 10% alcohol, obtained without dealcoholization. The total acidity is 3.8 and the pH is 3.3. For the first vintage, 15,000 bottles were prepared for a price of about €8.90, to be found at wine merchants.

HARVESTING LOW-ALCOHOL GRAPE VARIETIES EARLIER

Ugni blanc is one of the "chosen" of this cuvée with low alcohol content. This grape variety, the basis of the Armagnacs produced in Gascony, makes up 45% of *Imprévu*'s blend. *"Ugni blanc is harvested around 9% potential alcohol. The plots that are used for Imprévu are managed exactly like the plots of Ugni blanc for Armagnac. Only the yield target is different: 85 hl/ha versus 120 hl/ha. The size is in Double Guyot for Bas-Armagnacs and in Single Guyot for white wines in bottles. This allows us to develop more structured, more aromatic wines on exotic profiles. »*

To strengthen the Ugni blanc's aromatic structure, it is associated with Riesling. *"In 2010, we decided to plant 16 hectares of Riesling at 4,500 feet/hectare, on deep, cool soils. In the family, we love Alsace wines and we wanted to see the behaviour of this grape variety with strong aromatic potential on the estate. Today, these vines are ripe, and we note that in our pedoclimatic conditions, with a yield of 60 hl/ha, the Riesling does not naturally rise in degree. For Imprévu, we act only on the harvest date which occurs two weeks before the one planned for other uses."*

The stay in the cellar brings more challenges. Each variety undergoes a twelve-hour skin maceration. After pressing, the juices are kept for two weeks in the pre-fermentary stage in the cold on fine lees with stirring *"in order to obtain more primary fruit, but also to provide structure,"* explains Armin Grassa. *"The two grape varieties are then blended and co-fermented. The wine is aged ten weeks on fine lees in stainless steel tanks with daily stirring. This step makes it possible to amplify the structure of this wine that wants to be tasty despite an early harvest, by bringing it fat while remaining completely dry, without residual sugars."*

With this last characteristic, *Imprévu*, from Domaine Tariquet, stands out from other wines naturally low in alcohol.